

Proceeding: In the Matter of 1998 Biennial Regulatory Review -- Amendment of Part of the Record 1 of 1

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Allan M. Sniffen, WB2IXR
2390 Ridge St.
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August 16, 1998

Re: Docket # 98-143

The proposal of the FCC to change the structure of Amateur Radio Licensing is an idea that is long overdue. I agree that there are simply too many license classes.

The Commission has asked for opinions as to the Morse code requirement. In my view it is archaic and should be completely eliminated. Many amateurs view it as a necessary "filter" to keep the number of hams down. They are wrong. Today, our problem is getting people into this hobby rather than trying to keep them out. To require something that is clearly outdated is an unnecessary hurdle that hurts this hobby.

Understanding that as of now, Morse Code remains an international requirement for HF operation, my suggestion would be a very minimal code test of 5 words per minute for any license class that provides HF privileges. When the inevitable finally does occur (the elimination of the international requirement) then the FCC should then completely eliminate it as a requirement.

Regarding license classes: The FCC proposal is an improvement over the old system but doesn't go far enough. There should be two, and ONLY two amateur license classes. Call them what you like, but there should be an entry-level class, which makes it easy for a prospective amateur to become licensed and provides enough privileges for an introduction to the hobby. The second class should include everyone else. Such a structure is simple, easy to administer and in today's world the most logical.

We should remember what the original reason was for all these license classes (in 1961). The premise was "incentive licensing"; that is, the assumption that hams want more and more privileges on HF frequencies and are therefore willing to pass more difficult exams to attain them. That premise is now wrong. Most new hams find more interest in non-HF frequencies and show less and less interest in HF. Today, there is no "incentive".

But, there is a cost. The hobby is hampered by the image that it portrays to prospective amateurs (who we MUST appeal to). With all these license classes we create a "caste system" image to those who may be considering Amateur Radio as a hobby. Higher-class licensees are more "admired" than lower class licensees (for example they can request

“Vanity Callsigns” that differentiate them from everyone else). And yet, the areas where those with “higher” license classes have excelled is code and HF radio theory! What prospective ham is going to be impressed by that? It's like asking someone to be an expert in riding a horse in order to get a driver's license! It's just not relevant in today's world. It is, unfortunately, a turn off. Most prospective hams will simply not bother with it at all and, instead, turn on their computer where there is NO licensing requirement.

Today, with digital technology, computers and the Internet, this hobby cannot afford to turn off prospective hams by creating this impression. The FCC who ultimately is responsible for this hobby, cannot afford it either if we accept our stated purpose as having enough amateurs available when needed for emergencies and/or community assistance.

Our hobby and our rules have to reflect the world as it is, not as it was. Those in this hobby (including the A.R.R.L.) frequently do not. The FCC's suggestion of changing the license structure is a good start but needs to go further.

The goal should be the complete elimination of the Morse code requirement and the changing of the License Class Structure into two classes.

Allan M. Sniffen, WB2IXR
Age 40
Licensed since 1976
Amateur Advanced Class

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